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Critical Inquiry

The *Très Riches Heures*: An Illuminated Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Michael Camille

That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

In competition with other European publishing houses and after one year of negotiation, the Institut de France in Paris awarded *Facsimile Editions Lucerne* in April 1981 the exclusive right to produce the first complete facsimile of the most beautiful Book of Hours in the world, the “*Les Très riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.” . . . Because of its fragility it is displayed very rarely—a privilege accorded annually to about 6 people only. After the facsimile has been produced the original will be locked away forever!

—Publicity material from Faksimilé-Verlag Luzern

The “world’s most famous illuminated manuscript,” the *Très Riches Heures* (Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 65), begun for the duc de Berry by the Limbourg brothers, left incomplete at the death of both artists and patron in 1416, and finished only later in the century by Jean Colombe, has not lost but rather gained “aura” in the age of its mechanical reproducibility. From the sixty-five heliogravure plates luxuriously printed on *papier de cuve* in Paul Durrieu’s 1904 monograph up until today’s twelve thousand-dollar Lucerne facsimile, it has been re-

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presented as a luxury commodity, perpetuating the lavish associations of its princely owners. Walter Benjamin's influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" describes how photographic duplication "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced."¹ Tracing the reception and reproduction of the *Très Riches Heures* from its rediscovery in the nineteenth century to its most recent appearance in facsimile, this essay looks at how mechanical reproduction, rather than wrenching the artwork from the "domain of tradition," is a means of reproducing tradition itself. Rather than reactivating the object, reproduction more often freezes it into a nostalgic mirror for the most reactionary reflection.²

The outer slipcase of the partial facsimile published by George Braziller in 1969 (now available in paperback) bears a finely printed label, "One of the Miracles of Art History," as if this encased a relic with numinous powers. An important feature of relics of the saints during the Middle Ages was their hiddenness, their inaccessibility. When they were perceived it was only obliquely, through carved grilles, golden casings, and, later, thick crystal vials that rendered their fragmentary object-status ambiguous. The *Très Riches Heures* has recently attained this cultic status of occlusion and invisibility. The original manuscript in the Musée Condé at Chantilly has been withdrawn not only from public view but from anyone's gaze for reasons of conservation, protection, and its incalculable monetary value. This has caused something of a scandal in the world of manuscript libraries, which usually allow scholars and, in some cases, a wider public to use their holdings. Interviewed by the *New York Times*, Janet Backhouse of the

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), p. 221; hereafter abbreviated "WA." On this issue see also Joel Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura: A Reading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility,'" in *Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics*, ed. Gary Smith (Chicago, 1989), pp. 158–74.

2. See Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (New York, 1981), pp. 185–91. Williams shows how "cultural reproduction" operates "within the very processes of knowledge" and that "tradition can be shown, by analysis, to be a selection and reselection of those significant received and recovered elements of the past which represent not a necessary but a *desired* continuity" (pp. 182, 187).

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department of manuscripts at the British Library, London (which always keeps on view at least a selection of its most important holdings), stated that “if no one has access to a manuscript there is no reason for it to exist.”³

This new nonexistence of the *Très Riches Heures* is, I would argue, crucial to the existence of its replications. It is essential for each numbered copy of the limited facsimile edition that the original manuscript *not* be available for all to see. Most art historians, no matter how “contextual” or theoretical, would still emphasize the necessity of looking at the objects they study with that oddly singular, egocentrically well-trained “eye”/I. Left, however, with only the piles of reproductions I am forced to ask myself and my students not what is the *Très Riches Heures* (a nonentity hidden somewhere in a museum vault) but what are the books, pamphlets, postcards, facsimiles, and the laser discs that scholars working on the manuscript at Chantilly are now shown instead of the original? The manuscript now has the status of one of those hypothetical “lost prototypes,” beloved of scholars of manuscript illumination, that can only be seen refracted in its subsequent copies. Just as hypothesizing on the influence of early medieval “lost models” on existing works has always seemed to me a futile approach to medieval book painting, and preferring to view every manuscript as an object in its own right, I am not concerned with the lost and now forever invisible *Très Riches Heures* itself but rather with the power of its many reproductions.

1. Antiquarian Reproductions: The Rediscovery of the Manuscript for Aristocratic Connoisseurship

The aura of uniqueness that surrounds the manuscript now known as the *Très Riches Heures* is partly explained by its discontinuity in history and its “rediscovery” by its subsequent owner. This was Henri d’Orleans, fifth son of King Louis Philippe, who received the title of duc d’Aumale at his birth in 1822 and who in 1829 inherited the Condé fortune, including the Chateaux of Chantilly and its vast art collections. After the 1848 revolution and during the Second Empire, he was exiled in England with his wife, Marie-Caroline de Bourbon-Siciles, daughter

3. Quoted in Paul Lewis, “Preservation Takes Rare Manuscripts from the Public,” *New York Times*, Sunday, 25 Jan. 1987, Arts and Leisure section, p. 1; hereafter abbreviated “P.” In the reviews of the facsimile by *Diners Club Magazine* and other publications cited in Faksimilé-Verlag Luzern’s publicity brochure entitled “Masterpieces of Book Illumination in Faithful, Limited Fine Art Facsimile Editions,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is quoted as stating, “In Chantilly the Fine Art Facsimile Editions can be put on display with a clear conscience in future and the original kept secure under lock and key” (p. 21).

of the prince of Salerno. Their home, Orleans House in Twickenham, became a private museum for a varied and ever-expanding collection. It was in 1855 that the duke heard from another exile, Antonio Panizzi, principal librarian at the British Museum, that an exceptional manuscript was being offered for sale by Baron Felix de Margherita of Turin. The duke later wrote of his first glimpse of the treasure in December of that year.

When I first saw the *Heures du Duc de Berry* in a boarding school for young ladies, the Villa Pallavicini, on the outskirts of Genoa, I quickly perceived the beauty, style, and originality of the miniatures and of the decoration as a whole. I recognized the Duke's portrait, his coat of arms, the keep at Vincennes, etc. Not surprisingly, I was told that competition for the manuscript was intense. I replied not a word to this apparently empty threat which in fact turned out to be rather well-founded. Since my mind was made up, I entrusted the matter to Panizzi, and a month later the "illuminated Book of Hours . . ." (so described in the receipt) was mine.⁴

The duke's recognizing that the manuscript once belonged to Jean, duc de Berry (1340–1416) has to be linked to the availability of the earliest accurate facsimiles of illuminated manuscripts. These were the work of the Comte Jean-François-Auguste Bastard D'Estang (1792–1883), whose brother had been instrumental in the July monarchy of Louis Philippe and who, aided by the new regime, published a series of enormous and vastly expensive hand-painted plates of treasures from French national libraries, which included, in 1834, thirty plates under the title *Librairie de Jean de France, duc de Berry, frère du roi Charles V., publiée en son entier pour la première fois*.⁵ From the very beginning facsimiles provided a framework for further investment and collecting and not merely knowledge of past artworks, for it is unlikely that without knowing such publications the duc d'Aumale would have recognized that the manuscript he was inspecting could be added to the short list of the duc de Berry's treasures.

By 20 January 1856 the sum of eighteen thousand francs had been paid to the owner through an intermediary, "chevalier" Mengaldo. Acting for the duc d'Aumale's bankers, Messrs. Coutts of London, a

4. Chantilly, Musée Condé, *Le Cabinet des livres: manuscrits*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1900), 1:60; hereafter abbreviated *CL*. This passage is translated and quoted in Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the "Très Riches Heures" du Duc de Berry* (New York, 1988), p. 213; hereafter abbreviated *I*.

5. See Léopold Delisle, *Les Collections de Bastard d'Estang à la Bibliothèque Nationale, catalogue analytique* (Nogent-le-Rotrou, 1885), and Carl Nordenfalk, *Color of the Middle Ages: A Survey of Book Illumination Based on Color Facsimiles of Medieval Manuscripts* (exhibition catalog, University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, 12 Mar.–18 Apr. 1976), p. 14.

"Sieur Wust" of Genoa paid on behalf of the duke with commissions and travel expenses a total sum of twenty-two thousand francs, and the manuscript was dispatched in a small box to London. This was a large sum, considering that one could buy a Corot for 285 francs and an important Poussin went for 17,300 francs the same year (the wages for agricultural laborers, like those depicted in the soon to be famous calendar of the manuscript, were at this time just over one franc a day).⁶

On 15 February it arrived at the duc d'Aumale's residence at Twickenham where the duke's wife was the first to open the case. As the most recent description of the manuscript's history by Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer states, "From that moment on the Duc d'Aumale was utterly enamored of his splendid manuscript and allowed no other than himself to turn the pages" (*I*, p. 213). A special reliquary-like coffer was made by Vechte to contain the book and the duke began to show it to a select group of his bibliophile friends and experts whom he refers to as "grands érudits," "savants," and "délicats critiques" (*CL*, 1:60).

D'Aumale's obsession with his new manuscript has never been critically examined. However, to a contemporary observer like the British Tory politician Benjamin Disraeli, the link between the duke's taste in art and the problems of his political position was clear. He referred to the patronage of his friend in a speech to the Royal Literary Fund in the following terms:

"Happy the prince who, though exiled from his palaces and military pursuits through no fault of his own, finds a consolation in books and an occupation in the rich domain of Art. Happy the prince who, whilst living on terms of equality with the people of a strange country, still distinguishes himself by the superiority of his noble mind and character. Happy the prince who in adverse circumstances can defy fate and make conquests in the kingdom of letters, which cannot, like dynastic authority, be taken away from him."⁷

No longer able to win territorial victories, as he did in his battles in North Africa in 1843, the duke now sought conquests in the realm of art. Moreover, the *Très Riches Heures* represented not only a great work of French painting but one produced for a great aristocratic prince of the *ancien régime*. It was in this sense valued for its symbolic as well as its

6. The details of the duke's transactions are outlined in *I*, p. 213. For art prices see Hippolyte Mireur, *Dictionnaire des ventes d'art faites en France et à l'étranger pendant les XVIII^{me} et XIX^{me} siècles*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1911–12), and for laborers' wages, see Roger Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (New York, 1987), p. 161.

7. Quoted in Louise M. Richter, *Chantilly in History and Art* (London, 1913), pp. 131–32.

artistic worth. We know that the duc d'Aumale's scholarship was not innocent of personal identifications. His major work of this period was a long study of the imprisonment of Jean le Bon, the duc de Berry's grandfather, who was similarly exiled from his homeland in England during the Hundred Years' War.⁸ The twelve calendar illustrations in his new acquisition, picturing some of Berry's magnificent châteaux, would have had a resonance for the prince, who remembered walking in the grounds of the palace at Chantilly with his godfather the duc de Bourbon, hearing stories of its once "grand festivities given by his father to King Louis XV, to Marie Antoinette."⁹ Here were the lost splendors of feudal France where peasants labor in the fields and princes ride out to the hunt, an order that had been eroded by a century of social revolution. Next to art collecting, hunting was the duke's favorite pastime, and when he returned to Chantilly in 1871 he continued to enjoy the pleasures of the chase pictured on the December page of the calendar. The duc d'Aumale's father, King Louis Philippe, had traced his ancestors back to Saint Louis, making the links between the duke's treasured book and his own past both natural and immensely satisfying. There was still a Berry contending the French throne in this period, and by amazing coincidence, perhaps, one of the duke's testators was a M. de Limbourg.¹⁰ Just as the collector-financier Jean Béraud invested in the paintings of Georges Seurat during the 1890s with a style that seems to solidify "a capital still confident in its powers . . . still in active dialogue with science" and a "power born of observation and control," the medieval art served a similarly legitimating function for the very different aristocratic class interests of the duc d'Aumale.¹¹

A kind of double patron relationship is at work here: a sense in which the nineteenth-century duke can be seen as a *reproduction* of the fourteenth-century duke, especially since the mythology of the manuscript was to focus on the role of the first patron. The notion of the patron's part in creating the *Très Riches Heures* (based on no historical evidence) also allowed the duc d'Aumale to become its re-creator for the modern world. The outstanding connoisseur, like d'Aumale, was more than a consumer. He was able to transcend the passive role of

8. See Henri Eugène Philippe Louis d'Orléans, duc d'Aumale, *Notes et documents relatifs à Jean, Roi de France, et à sa captivité en Angleterre* (London, 1855). The best modern account of the duke's life is by Cazelles, the expert on the *Très Riches Heures*: see his *Le Duc D'Aumale: Prince aux dix visages* (Paris, 1984).

9. Richter, *Chantilly in History and Art*, p. 114. See Cazelles, *Le Duc D'Aumale*, p. 207.

10. See René Valléry-Radot, *Le Duc D'Aumale d'après sa correspondance avec Cuvillier-Fleury, 1840-1871* (Paris, 1922).

11. T. J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1983), pp. 214-15.

patron and enter into the creation myth by building a collection of paintings and manuscripts that was itself viewed as an artwork.

What might be called the first “exhibition” of the *Très Riches Heures* was not really a public one. On 21 May 1862 the duke opened his house at Twickenham and its collections to members of the Fine Arts Club of which he was a leading member during his first exile, which lasted till 1871. (He was also president of the exclusive, forty-member Philobiblon Society.) A list of dignitaries and other important people to be invited was drawn up by Count Granville, and the duke published a catalogue for the occasion.¹² Thus from its beginnings the manuscript was re-created in the context of aristocratic luxury. Its exclusive power continues to reverberate ironically today in the current curator of Chantilly’s pronouncement that no one except “some visiting head of state might be shown it if he asked” (“P,” p. 1). While we tend to think of the nineteenth-century revival of the Middle Ages as having a strong reformist aspect, exemplified by writers like John Ruskin and William Morris, we should not forget that at the same time as the former was cutting up illuminated manuscripts as examples of pure craftsmanship to distribute at his working-men’s clubs, those interested in the scholarly, textual, and historical aspects of manuscripts and libraries of the past were, both in France and England, predominantly aristocrats.¹³

The duc d’Aumale’s discovery and ownership of the *Très Riches Heures* is an important aspect of many of the subsequent representations of the manuscript. His becomes a crucial context, just as important as that of the duc de Berry himself. It is ironic that its least expensive and most “popular” modern reproduction, the tiny 1962 *Orbis* picture book with an introductory text by Franz Hattinger, should be the most concerned with the aristocratic pedigree of its reception. Here fictions of exclusiveness are tied up with an evocation of the duc d’Aumale’s taste, which is described as natural to one of his birth, being “descended from one of the oldest families of France” and thereby “devoted to the noblest traditions of French culture.”¹⁴ Describing the

12. For details of this exhibition, see Cazelles, *Le Duc D’Aumale*, p. 207. For a description of an “agreeable” breakfast at the duke of Aumale’s by a member of the Philobiblon Society of 1855, see A. N. L. Munby, *Connoisseurs and Medieval Miniatures 1750–1850* (Oxford, 1972), p. 90. For details of the club see Octave Delepierre, *Analyse des travaux de la Société des Philobiblon de Londres* (London, 1862), which begins with a dedication exactly like the presentation or dedication rubrics found in medieval manuscripts: “Hommage du compilateur, au patron de la société des philobiblon, son altesse royale Henri d’Orléans, duc d’Aumale.”

13. The best account of this tradition in England is Munby, *Connoisseurs and Medieval Miniatures* (who cites Ruskin’s iconoclastic, democratizing dismemberment of missals on p. 160). For France there is no general study, but see Jean Pozzi, “Le Comte Alexander de Laborde et les manuscrits à peintures,” *Erster Internationaler Bibliophilen-Kongress: München 29–31 Mai 1959* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 49–53.

14. Franz Hattinger, *The Duc de Berry’s Book of Hours* (Bern, 1962), p. 3.

moment of d'Aumale's first opening the book, Hattinger relates how "a unique privilege had been vouchsafed to him. By giving fresh lustre to a forgotten masterpiece he would make his own name illustrious. It would be coupled forever with the names of those distinguished men who were responsible for that creation."¹⁵

In order to "create" the *Très Riches Heures* d'Aumale needed opinions that would validate the historical status of his prized possession and guarantee its quality and uniqueness. To this end he invited into his home to examine it the pioneer in the classification and description of art, Gustav Waagen, director of the Royal Academy of Pictures in Berlin. Ruskin described him caustically but with his usual insight as a figure tied to the legitimation of the past: "Dr Waagen . . . of such mighty name as a Connoisseur, was a most double-dyed ass . . . an intolerable fool—a good authority only in matters of tradition."¹⁶ It was exactly the academic authority of tradition and the scientific surface of the new German discipline of art history that was necessary to enshrine the *Très Riches Heures* forever as a monument.

Waagen's account of the manuscript appears in his *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain*, which contains descriptions of other major works of art then in private collections. In order to know what was what and where, Waagen was allowed into the inner sanctum of the Victorian family, entering into their private social rituals where great art was enshrined like household gods in the Roman *domus*. He relates how it was after "breakfast *en famille*" that the duke proceeded "in the kindest way, to do the honours of his collection." The detailed ten-page description of the manuscript mentions that "the researches of the Duke d'Aumale" have uncovered the name of the painter—Nicolas Robert.¹⁷ This need to attribute the *Très Riches Heures* to one single artist was clearly an important issue for the owner, even at this early stage, twenty years before Léopold Delisle's discovery of the document that, in linking authorship with the Limbourg brothers, first introduced the disturbing factor of division of labor.

Waagen's search for "treasures," his expert "sniffing out" of dates, clues, and hands seems predicated on two predominant genres of the period, the novel and the detective story. Waagen was well known for relying on his visual memory and did not use photographs in his research. The fact that the reader has to depend on the evocations of

15. Ibid. Hattinger also states that "of the Duc de Berry's life not much need be said" (p. 9). Cazelles and Rathofer restate the importance of Aumale as "creator" at the beginning of the section "The *Très Riches Heures* and Art Historians" in *I*, p. 214.

16. Quoted in Munby, p. 160.

17. Gustav Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain: Being an Account of More than Forty Collections of Paintings, Drawings, Sculptures, Mss., etc. etc. Visited in 1854 and 1856, and Now for the First Time Described* (London, 1857), pp. 247, 249; hereafter abbreviated GC.

form and subject matter from the words alone is important to the development of the mystique of connoisseurship. Although armed with photographic proofs it will be the manipulation of language (*like, similar, and compare*) that will help Bernard Berenson and later forensic experts of the painterly trace to capture suspects and name names. Waagen's description is in a sense the first reproduction of the manuscript, despite it being in textual rather than visual terms.

Another aspect of Waagen's long description is the nationalistic vocabulary through which the importance of the work is judged. Comparisons are made with Italian art, especially the trecento "Primitives," then just beginning to come into vogue. "Judging from these pictures," asserts Waagen, "we may conclude, firstly, that the French painters, while they did not surpass the Italian of the same time in elevation of moral conception and in style of drapery, were far superior to them in mastery of the means of representation" (*GC*, p. 258). Here one of the first professional art historians sets up the issues that are to dominate discussions of the manuscript as recently as the work of Millard Meiss—its "naturalism" in competition with Italian art. By comparing the work of its painters with others and tracing its genealogy and later influence (its artists are called predecessors of Jean Fouquet), Waagen positions it in art historical discourse and authorizes it as an "important" work in the sequence of hundreds of works that make up the pinnacles of "art history." Finally he calls it a wonderfully preserved "relic" as if imbuing it with the cultic authenticity of historical value had made it a piece of some undecomposing numinous body (*GC*, p. 259).

But the owner as patron-creator used such expert evidence to further his own self-inscription within the *Très Riches Heures* itself. This is clear in the letter he received in February 1881 from another scholar, Léopold Delisle, who was eager to relate his discovery of the missing piece of evidence. What named the suspect or in this case the suspects was an inventory made at the duke's death in 1416.

"Sir, I have no doubt that your Hours of the Duc de Berry correspond to the following article in the official report of the inventory and appraisal made after the Duke's death and preserved in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève: 'in a box several signatures of a very rich Hours undertaken by Paul and his brothers, richly illustrated and decorated—500 livres.'"¹⁸

From other related documents Delisle was able to unravel a great deal about the three brothers, who were in fact Flemish, and the history of

18. Quoted in Jean Longnon and Cazelles, *The "Très Riches Heures" of Jean, Duc of Berry*, trans. Victoria Benedict (New York, 1969), p. 26.

their employment by the duc de Berry. He was also quick to point out that his findings corroborated “‘the different hands recognized by your Highness in the earlier parts of the book.’”¹⁹

This document also crucially provides the name *Très Riches Heures*. It is little noted how we entitle famous works of art in a way that helps dehistoricize them since these appellations have nothing to do with how they were nominated in production. The *Très Riches Heures* was a label given in the legal process of monetary evaluation after the duke's death in an inventory of his goods, thus locating it as an object of real, not symbolic, value. We do not know how the duc de Berry referred to it, being just one of sixteen books of hours he owned. If the term *riches* is a relative signal of its worth in 1416, for Delisle and the duc d'Aumale it becomes part of an aesthetic vocabulary denoting refinement and splendid surface effects and not merely the actual cost of materials. The term is still used with its luxurious connotations by those publishers who sell its reproductions.

In his great unfinished study of nineteenth-century France, the *Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin relates collecting to mechanical reproduction, since both wrest the object “from all its original functions.” But it is hard to talk about the “original function” of the *Très Riches Heures* being anything other than always already collected, beginning its existence as loose leaves in the duc de Berry's *cabinet*, as “masterpieces” by his own talented trio of painters, and not as a useable prayerbook. The *Très Riches Heures* then is one of the earliest artworks conceived as a commodity fetish, as “a form of practical memory,” to use Benjamin's terms, in which “the collector's most profound enchantment is to enclose the particular in a magic circle where it petrifies, while the final thrill (the thrill of being acquired) runs through it.”²⁰

In 1881 when Delisle made his discovery of the document in the public Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève there had been no reproductions of the duke's private manuscript in Cheltenham, and only a small select group of experts and librarians had ever seen it. Reproductive techniques of steel engraving and lithography were already available; the earliest engraved facsimiles of illuminated books date back to the eighteenth century. It was only when Delisle eventually published the document naming the Limbourgs in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* of 1884 that the world first “saw” the *Très Riches Heures*. Its unique authorship and its proliferation in reproduction were celebrated simultaneously.

19. Ibid.

20. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 1:271. See also Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 416 nn. 131–34. Benjamin's position regarding the collector is also discussed by Douglas Crimp in “This Is Not a Museum of Art,” in *Marcel Broodthaers*, ed. Marge Goldwater (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 72–73.

In the same year, 1884, the duc d'Aumale left the rebuilt chateau at Chantilly and all its contents to the Institut de France, carefully prescribing how to preserve the integrity of the whole place, its architecture, gardens, "trophies, books, archives, objets d'art." Altogether these formed what he called "a complete and varied monument of French art in all its branches and the history of his country in its epochs of glory." D'Aumale also stressed how art "without withdrawing itself from the inevitable transformations of society escapes the spirit of factions as in extreme shocks, conserving its independence in the midst of political fluctuations."²¹ At the symbolic center of this embalmed art world of the past was the *Très Riches Heures*, a miniature utopia whose miniscule spaces provided shelter from the vastly complicated present. A painting of the duke in his *cabinet des livres*, now at Chantilly, shows him protected by a wall of books, holding a volume open to another viewer and expounding with a gesture that in medieval manuscripts signalled God's creation of the universe (fig. 1).

Even after his death in 1897 the duke continued to control how his manuscripts were seen through the posthumous publication of a catalogue, published by the Institut de France with fifty thousand francs he had bequeathed for this purpose. His description of the *Très Riches Heures* is the longest, amounting to nearly sixteen pages, and rhapsodizes how "the book holds a grand place in the history of art; I dare say that it has no rival" (CL, 1:61). Three heliogravure plates are reused from the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, and a footnote lists all the reproductions that have appeared to date. This shows that the owner-author still had control and cognizance of the multiplication of reproductions from his book, something that would be impossible fifty years later.

D'Aumale's attitude toward photographic reproduction, however, is ambiguous. It is only in a footnote that the reader is told that "reproductions of the following miniatures have been appended," suggesting a second-order status to these images compared to the information of the text. Moreover, it is the scholarly writing up of the book, not its visual reproduction, that concerns him. "These Hours merit a complete description," he states, "a profound appraisal," and he hopes that "others will accomplish this task" (CL, 1:61). In creating the *Très Riches Heures* d'Aumale was creating a genealogy, rather like his relatives who were always struggling to have their rights to the French throne confirmed by documents. Authority was textual and the idea of visual reproduction of his book of hours must have seemed alien to someone who had spent countless hours turning its pages, not reciting the sanctified temporal segments of the *Horae* text but staring into its ordered vistas

21. Quoted in Chantilly, Musée Condé, *Peintures de l'école italienne* (Paris, 1988), p. 14.



FIG. 1.—Gabriel Joseph Marie Augustin Ferrier, *Le duc d'Aumale dans le cabinet des livres avec un ami*. Musée Condé, Chantilly.

of feudal timelessness. However, once d'Aumale had secured its "place in the history of art," the stage was set for its spectacular visual democratization.

2. Modernist Reproductions: Autonomy and Popularity

The first audience for reproductions of the *Très Riches Heures* were the would-be connoisseurs who subscribed to the 1884 *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, the most successful of the many European fine-art journals proliferating at this time. Although Delisle's three-part article concerns all the manuscripts belonging to the duc de Berry, including the *Belles Heures* then owned by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, only the *Très Riches Heures* is reproduced: "In place of a description, the elements of which I lack and which in any case would be very insufficient, I refer to the heliogravures that the liberality of the proprietor has permitted M. Dujardin to execute for the *Gazette* and which give as exact an idea of the original that one can expect from a reproduction in black and

white.”²² The insufficiency of language to describe the visual is an old trope, here revived in a situation where the image for the first time literally replaces the need for Waagen-like ekphrasis. It actually contradicts d’Aumale’s statement in the catalogue, just cited, that the manuscript’s contents should be fully described. This denial of language (underlined by the refusal to admit the text pages of the manuscript into the realm of “art”) continues in all its subsequent publications.

The image between pages 110 and 111 of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* is significant in a number of respects (fig. 2). It is not, for example, described as a facsimile, a word that *does* occur later on page 423 of the same issue to describe a typographically reproduced line engraving of Holbein’s painting of Erasmus in the Louvre (“facsimilé typographique d’un premier état de la planche de M. F. Bracquemond”). There is, rather, a consciousness of the intermediary of the printing process; the names of the engraver—Dujardin—and the printing firm—Eudes—that did the work appear on the page. Heliogravure, perfected as a method in 1854, was a complex process of line photogravure using a light-sensitized, acid-resisting ground when etching a copper plate. An improved technique of using a transparent photographic positive in place of the wax engraving made it the most widely used process in France at this period.²³ Its high definition, a result of much retouching and working on the plate, and its rich tonal quality make a stark contrast with the line-engraved reproduction of a fourteenth-century miniature, used merely as a decorative endpiece across the page. While both are printed reproductions of medieval images one is privileged by its photographic origins as more “real.”

The caption does not tell us that this is folio 6v. of the manuscript at Chantilly; rather, the image is framed as if it were a topographical photograph, a view of Paris—“L’Ancien Palais de Saint Louis et la Sainte Chapelle sous Charles V. Miniature des Grandes Heures du duc de Berry (Bibliothèque de Mgr. le duc d’Aumale).” The odd appellation, *Grandes*, now given to another of the duke’s manuscripts, Bibliothèque Nationale ms lat. 919, shows us that the *Très Riches* title was not yet current.²⁴ It will be referred to as the *Heures de Chantilly* (its paternal, aristocratic origin) in many publications during the opening years of the century.

22. Delisle, “*Les Livres d’heures du duc de Berry*,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 29 (May 1884): 401–2. The first two parts of his article were published in the February and April issues, pp. 97–111 and pp. 281–92.

23. For heliogravure see Geoffrey Ashall Glaister, *Glossary of the Book: Terms Used in Paper-making, Printing, Bookbinding, and Publishing* (London, 1960), p. 1177, and the useful survey by Susan Lambert, *The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1987).

24. For this manuscript see Marcel Thomas, *The Grandes Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, trans. Benedict and Benita Eisler (New York, 1971).

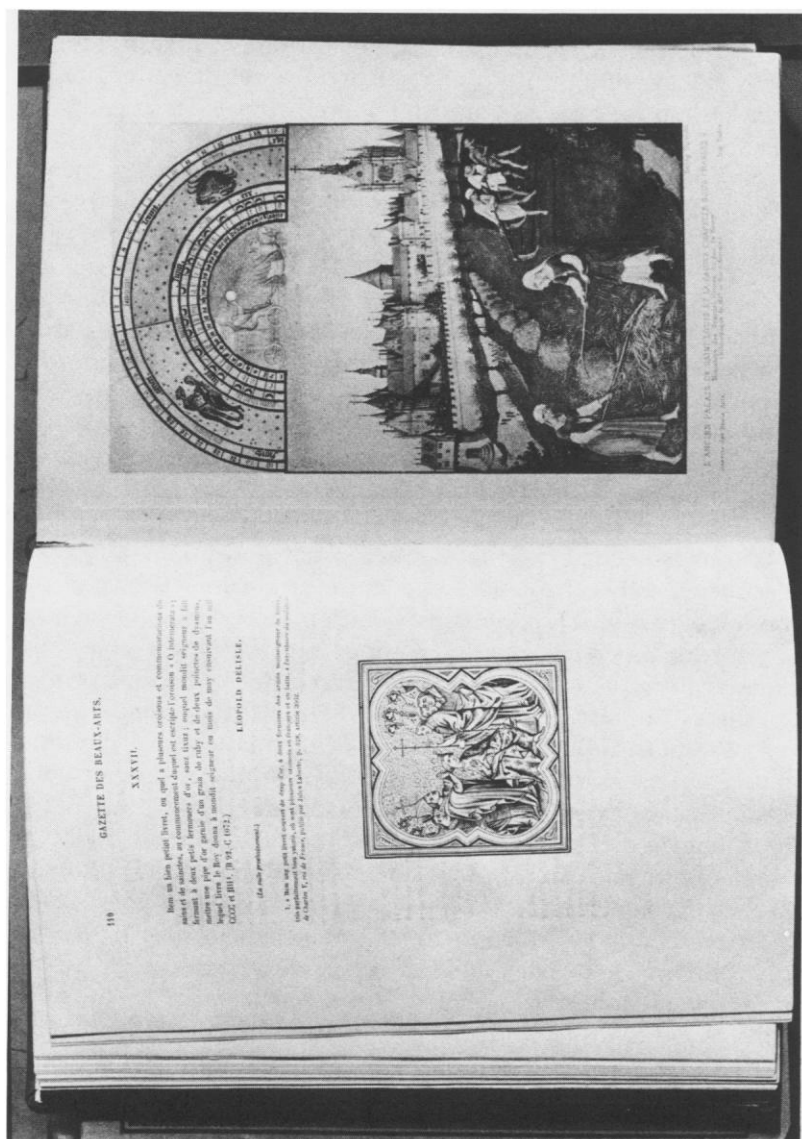


FIG. 2.

In 1904 M. Paul le Comte Durrieu, one of a group of prominent aristocrat-scholars of the period, continuing in the tradition of d'Aumale, produced the first monograph on the manuscript that he called *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, duc de Berry. Chantilly*.²⁵ This volume had sixty-five heliogravure plates (again by Dujardin) and one in color (the January page with its glorification of the duke and his "rich" life-style). Bound in embossed cloth and leather, it was printed in an edition limited to three hundred numbered copies. Its appearance coincided with the great exhibition of French primitives held in Paris from April to July 1904 at the Pavillon de Marsan and the Bibliothèque Nationale. This was one of the most important exhibitions of French art ever held, stimulating taste for late Gothic panel painting and exposing the beginnings of French art as a kind of proto-Renaissance. "It appears undisputable," in the words of one handbook to the show, "that contrary to secular theory, France played a great part in the artistic European movement."²⁶ In the exhibition, works by the Limbourgs were displayed as revealing the superiority of French over Italian art. Just as the impressionists had made Paris the world's art center of the late nineteenth century, the national past was now reclaimed and exhibited in a craze for the naive charm of these medieval "primatifs."

The *Très Riches Heures* made its first public appearance as number seventy-two in the section of the exhibition devoted to "Manuscrits à Peintures" at the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the form of twelve of the Dujardin heliogravures from Durrieu's edition. The catalogue stresses the reproduction of the manuscript, stating that "the inestimable value of this masterpiece . . . has often been observed since the notice which was published with four heliogravures in 1884 in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*."²⁷ At the most influential exhibition of medieval art of the time, the manuscript was presented to the public, as it would be forevermore, not in its original form but through reproductions.

The calendar pictures were to appear in many general books on the history of French painting and on medieval art in the following decades, but the next major reproduction effort involved color printing. The first color reproductions were published in the Parisian art quarterly *Verve* in 1940. Each issue of this lavish magazine cost three hundred francs. Its director, E. Tériade, wanted to make it "the most beautiful magazine in the world," and, financed by American capital, the *Très Riches Heures* was presented, along with paintings and prints by

25. See Paul Durrieu, *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, duc de Berry* (Chantilly, 1904).

26. Henri Bouchot, *Les Primitifs Français 1292–1500* (Paris, 1904), p. 5.

27. "Manuscrits à peintures," *Exposition des primitifs français*, ed. Bouchot et al. (exhibition catalog, Palais du Louvre and Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Apr. 1904), p. 29: "Au rez-de-chaussée sont exposés sous verre des fac-si-milé de manuscrits de premier ordre qu'il n'était pas possible de mettre en original sous les yeux des visiteurs" (p. 3).

Picasso and Braque, as the democratization of high and mostly modernist art (fifteen thousand copies of the first issue sold in 1937). The statement of purpose in that first issue included the aims of presenting art as

intimately mingled with the life of each period and to furnish testimony of the participation by artists in the essential events of their time. . . .

It will present documents as they are, without any arrangement which might detract from their naturalness.

That the illustrations may retain the impact of the originals, VERVE will utilize the technical methods best suited to each reproduction.²⁸

The process used for the *Très Riches Heures* issue was color photo-gravure, which results in a velvety softness but with strong linear effects. The gold-embossed front and back covers of the magazine give it an authentic "rich" feel. Only the twelve calendar pictures are reproduced, cut out from their vellum backgrounds. Their layout is reversed; they appear on the recto, not verso, page to suit the modern reader's expectations of priority. The arch-shaped plates are pasted onto each page because color printing had to be done on shiny coated paper. There is no text, neither the calendar itself nor any title to detract from the autonomous clarity of these images, now made into modernist isolated paintings, like works by Matisse in the next issue of the magazine. Despite these realignments, their veracity to the manuscript is stressed in the effusive editorial.

We would like to underline the great difficulties which have been overcome before being able to present the facsimiles of the Calendar of the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*.

Begun in July 1939, the work of reproduction slowly continued during the war and thanks to the great kindness of Mr. Henry Malo, curator at the Condé Museum at Chantilly.

The manuscript contains the finest paintings in the world, in colors so delicate that reproduction seemed impossible by those processes that utilize chemical tones to replace the blue of lapis lazuli, the purples, the iron greens employed by the artists of the fifteenth century. The purity of the colors of this manuscript as Robert Draeger has remarked to us, "bedazzled" the photographic plates. . . .

This success necessitated craftsmanship totally exceptional in our time, and will be a milestone in the history of color reproduction.

The Calendar of the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry* for the

28. *Verve* 1, no. 1 (1937).

first time, therefore, belongs to the public in its integrity and with the dimensions of the original paintings.²⁹

This nationalistic reverie has to be seen in the context of France in 1940. If the space of distant vistas and expansive lands had evoked for the duc d'Aumale the territories owned by his ancestors and lost in modern revolutions, those who bought this edition of *Verve* would no doubt have felt a similar nostalgia at a time of foreign occupation. This issue was such a success that two years later, in the midst of the Vichy regime, the editors reproduced the parts of the manuscript showing images of the life of Jesus. No one better describes the impact of the *Verve* reproductions on the nationalistic idealism of French culture at this time than the writer Adrienne Monnier:

Before *The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry* I seemed to perceive, as through a magic emerald the very nature of France; our land and its people dressed in bold colours; gestures of work as pure as those of the Mass; women in flowerlike dresses; fanfares of leisure; living water, branches; desires and loves; beautiful castles in the distance; a comforting sky; our animals near us; our days coloured with hope and finely woven.³⁰

A very different series of reproductions of the manuscript appeared in the 5 January 1948 issue of *Life* (fig. 3). The article is given a general title—"The Book of Hours"—partly because most American readers would not know what a book of hours was, let alone a *très riches* one. These latter words are never used in the article, suggesting the different way such a European artifact comes to stand for very different symbols of power and status across the Atlantic. The same modernist strategy of isolating the spiritual value of high art and feeding it in palatable form for "democracy" occurs in a number of features on contemporary and past European art that, sprinkled through issues of *Life*, must have brought names and images quite unknown to thousands of Americans in the 1940s. In the same issue as a long article entitled "Portrait of an American Communist" and juxtaposed with full-page ads, including "For Men of Distinction . . . Lord Calvert Whiskey," appear the "medieval" life-style ads—the twelve calendar pages.

At the dawn of a new year, when new calendars are being hung up all over the world, LIFE presents the most famous calendar of all time. It is the surpassingly beautiful Book of Hours made for the Duc de Berry, one of the greatest private art patrons of the

29. *Verve* 2, no. 7 (1940).

30. Adrienne Monnier, *The Very Rich Hours of Adrienne Monnier*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York, 1976), pp. 213–17.

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Middle Ages. The 12 calendar paintings in the book are reproduced on the following pages a little larger than actual size.³¹

Everything in America is “larger than life,” so the miniatures are blown up in color separation technique using a crude crossline screen. The technique is again photogravure, which was still cheap enough to produce vast runs of such magazines using cylinders. Gravure differs from relief printing in that like most intaglio processes it deposits different depths of ink. The ink is held in separate cells in the gravure plate, forming a screen. The screen was not very fine in this case, and the honeycomblike cells are clearly visible on the surface. This is the cheapest reproduction ever sold of the manuscript and is very clearly a printed reproduction; its murky blues and overcold tones as well as the blurred edges show up badly against the *Verve* reproductions with their fine glossy paper and more subtle color separation.

The most startling transformation in the *Life* reproductions, however, is the censorship of the genitals of one of the peasants in the February scene (figs. 4 and 5), an iconographically significant detail that even the nineteenth-century engravers had kept.³² Genitals were unsuitable for the American public in 1948, although a few pages later a female nude lies on her back stretched out to the gaze of United States servicemen-become-artists in a black-and-white photograph. This suggests that the body in “art” terms had only a few acceptable, and usually female, positions. The fact that, in reproducing this page for the largest audience ever, the editors cut out parts and retouched it shows how careful we must be in accepting reproductions as exact equivalents of their referents. The *Très Riches Heures* is here framed, emasculated, and recolored through Cold War eyes.

The very title of the magazine—*Life*—and its famous photodocumentary spreads situate these images as snapshots of “medieval life,” but the introductory text makes more of “the man,” the duc de Berry himself, who is described as “like an American tycoon shuttling across country from one branch office to another.”³³ The story of the duke’s spending, his “collecting instinct,” and his delight in pets and jewels evokes great American collectors like William Randolph Hearst.

In postwar art history, too, the patron is still the major focus. Millard Meiss entitled his vast five-volume study of the period *French Painting at the Time of Jean de Berry*, and in the first volume, *The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke*, stated: “I believe no-one

31. “The Book of Hours,” *Life*, 5 Jan. 1948, p. 38.

32. The exposing of the genitals was a sign of animal sensuality and signalled the peasant’s inferior status. See the forthcoming article by J. J. G. Alexander, “The Lazy Peasant in the *Très Riches Heures*,” and the discussion of genital exposure in my book, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 85–86.

33. “The Book of Hours,” p. 38.

will contest the statement—though it has not I think previously been made—that between 1380 and 1400 *every* great cycle of miniatures in France was commissioned by the Duke of Berry. After 1400 the works he ordered were not quite so unique, but he remained an unrivalled connoisseur until his death in 1416.”³⁴ At the time of its publication in 1967, Meiss’s approach was in fact criticized as “the aristocratic approach to art criticism” in a penetrating review in the *Art Bulletin* by the Dutch scholar L. M. J. Delaisé (although his own position was somewhat nationalistic and anti-French).³⁵ He saw this focus on the tastes of one man as a narrow ahistorical obsession based on postmedieval notions of genius. This aristocratic approach continued, however, in 1969 with the appearance of a partial facsimile, with a preface by Meiss, published in America by Braziller but actually printed in France by the same Draeger brothers who had been involved in the *Verve* issue. It was one of a number of fairly low cost but high quality volumes reproducing manuscripts on thick paper that in its creamy color gave the effect of vellum. The process used was offset lithography, which became increasingly popular with the accelerating costs of photogravure. The major difference in this process lies in the printing stage where the ink, instead of being directly transferred to the paper, is set off from the plate onto an intermediate rubber roller and from that is transferred. This is a better means of controlling the ink and is substantially cheaper than producing the metal cylinders of the gravure method. In this process, too, text can be easily combined in the same printing as the images. In the Braziller volume textual commentary is integrated alongside the reproductions. Meiss is careful to point out the superiority of these.

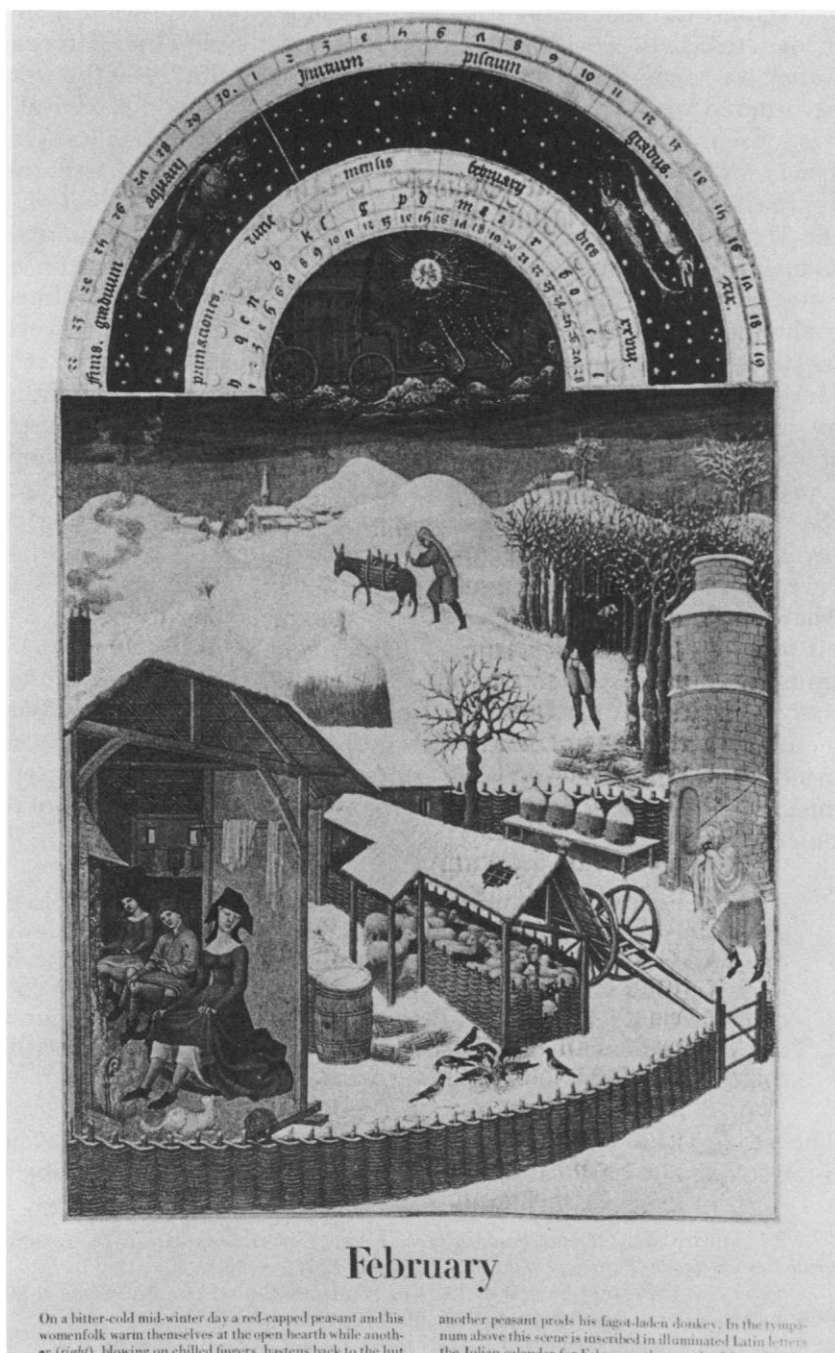
The calendar of the Limbourgs and indeed their entire cycle in the *Très Riches Heures* has become in our time one of the most famous of all works of art even though, until now, nearly everyone has known it only in reproductions that blur its subtle light and color or its perfect detail. Such wide popularity is absolutely exceptional for an illuminated manuscript that is closed in a library rather than, like other forms of painting, displayed in a public space.³⁶

The weakest aspect of the reproductions can be seen in the gold, which is too strong and obfuscates, for example, the fine detail of the objects

34. Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry, Part I: The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke* (London, 1967), p. viii.

35. L. M. J. Delaisé, review of *The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke*, by Meiss, *Art Bulletin* 52 (June 1970): 206–12.

36. Longnon and Cazelles, *The “Très Riches Heures” of Jean, Duc of Berry*, p. 7. For technical information about improved color printing techniques in this period, the best source is the trade journal *The Penrose Annual*. See especially Bernhard Baer, “Printing for the Arts,” *The Penrose Annual* (1966), pp. 59–94.



February

On a bitter-cold mid-winter day a red-capped peasant and his womenfolk warm themselves at the open hearth while another (right), blowing on chilled fingers, hastens back to the hut

another peasant prods his fagot-laden donkey. In the tympanum above this scene is inscribed in illuminated Latin letters the Julian calendar for February, the month of Amour.

FIG. 4.—*Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*. Folio 2 verso: February. From *Life*, 5 Jan. 1948.

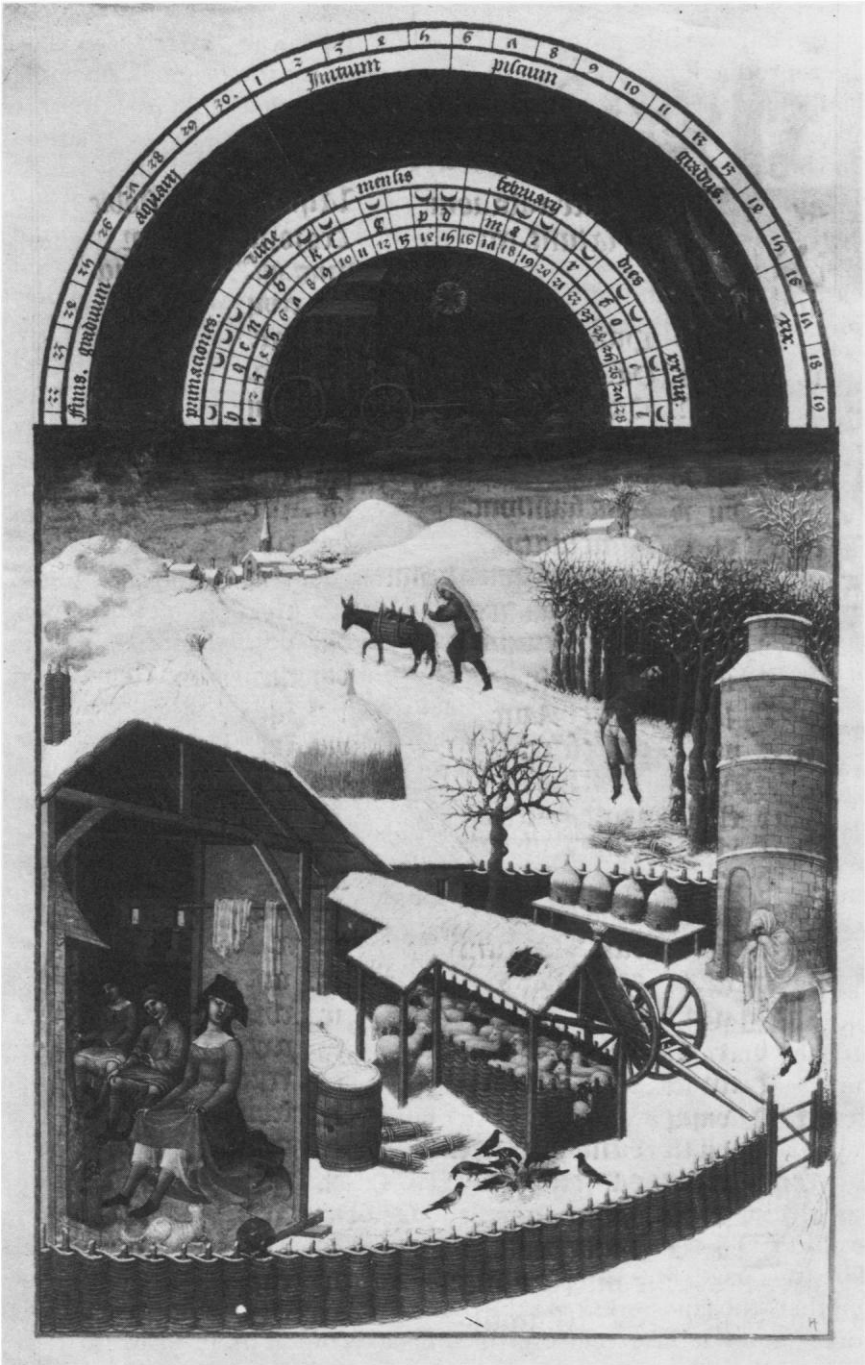


FIG. 5.—Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 1284. *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*. Folio 2 verso: February. From the photograph collection of the department of art, the University of Chicago.

on the duke's table in the January page. Indeed, its materiality makes the reproductions appear more sumptuous than the original, since the Limbourgs used a good deal of liquid gold as well as gold leaf. But the main problem with this partial facsimile is that it distorts the relationship between textual commentary and the reproduction of whole pages. The calendar paintings, reproduced for the first time on their proper verso page, face not the text of the calendar but a short explanation printed on the same cream-colored surface. The modernist obsession with surfaces in this glossy streamlined construct is constantly undermined by its mythic claim of accuracy to the unique original. In this perfect, 1960s coffee-table book the images are explained in a facile, formalist commentary as if they were isolated works of art. Perhaps justifiably, the completeness of the object has to be sacrificed to its explication for the easily distracted audience. But whereas Ruskin cut up Gothic manuscripts in order to explain medieval craftsmanship to his audience of the lower classes this medieval book is gutted to go with cheese and crackers.

The issue of class representation is raised in Meiss's introduction to the volume, but it was Erwin Panofsky who first focused on this important issue. He noticed the difference in stylistic presentation of the aristocratic figures, who "tended to be more linear in design" compared to the peasants who are "more broadly and freely treated," concluding that for the Limbourg brothers, "a naturalistic mode of presentation was not as yet a general principle of art; as far as human beings are concerned, it almost amounted to a class distinction."³⁷ However, what Panofsky saw as class distinctions scholars later attributed to distinct artists at work in the calendar. Meiss noticed that all the calendar pictures showing the court are thought to be by masters A and B whereas those showing the peasants are given to masters C and D.

Modernist art priorities insisted on the notion of individual authorship; to have a group of brothers or masters is not enough—their individual genius had to be isolated. As early as 1904 Durrieu had stressed that although there are different hands in the calendar miniatures, the whole manuscript "bears the stamp of one guiding intelligence" (quoted in *I*, p. 220). Attributing different miniatures in the calendar to different brothers was addressed in Meiss's study, *The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries* (1974). He gave Pol the pioneering cast-shadows and light-effects of the October page and saw the other brothers as working in a more traditional international Gothic style. The June page, for example, presented enormous problems since Meiss felt that "the landscape lacks the dynamic equilibrium of July. Its curvature relates it most closely to February but it is inferior to that

37. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 1:171.

miniature also."³⁸ He noted that the two foreground figures are painted in a different way, and he decided to label this plate "Paul de Limbourg (assisted) and Colombe?" Meiss's argument is of course impossible to verify, being based on privileged access to the object itself that makes possible minute observations of brushstrokes and underdrawings not visible in the reproductions in his book.

In recent years there has been a total revision of Meiss's view with the suggestion that some of the calendar pictures neither are by the Limbourgs nor were completed by Jean Colombe in the 1480s but rather are by another unknown artist working in the midcentury. This radical notion, argued by three major scholars, including Raymond Cazelles, the manuscript's keeper, defines the achievements of the Limbourgs very differently from Meiss who viewed the brothers as artists making all the major steps forward in European naturalism. The October, the June, and even the February page are dated some thirty years later.³⁹ While this argument makes the manuscript in many ways more interesting, it removes it from the forefront of naturalistic experimentation in the early fifteenth century, which it held since d'Aumale's day.

In the most recent publication of the manuscript, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth* (1988), the authors explain these divergencies of scholarly opinion alongside the reproductions. For the first time the whole opening of each calendar page is reproduced but in microscopic format in the margins of the left-hand page of text (fig. 6)! Most attention is given to a series of blown-up details of tiny areas of the vellum surface. One might think these close-ups allow the reader to make connoisseurlike choices, but only certain selected details are reproduced. Next to the problematic June picture, enlarged to show the girl raking, appears the author's gloss that "Meiss suggests that Paul de Limbourg is primarily responsible for this miniature, but that it was completed at a later date, possibly by Jean Colombe. Cazelles believes that it belongs to the mid-fifteenth century" (*I*, p. 34). Relativity rules. The connoisseurs are no longer the authorities presenting the image but glosses suggesting a variety of viewpoints.

As well as the present anxiety of conning/cunning connoisseurship, this book also embodies the new information technology of the laser disc copy available at the Musée Condé, which projects sections of

38. Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry; The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries* (New York and London, 1974), p. 194.

39. See Luciano Bellosi, "I Limbourg precursori di Van Eyck? Nuove osservazione sui 'Mesi' di Chantilly," *Prospettiva*, no. 1 (Apr. 1975): 23–34; Eberhard König, "Le Peintre de l'Octobre des 'Très Riches Heures de Duc de Berry,'" *Les Dossiers de l'archéologie* 16 (May–June 1976): 96–123; and Cazelles, "Les Étapes de l'élaboration des Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry," *Revue française d'histoire du livre* 10 (Jan.–Mar. 1976): 1–30.

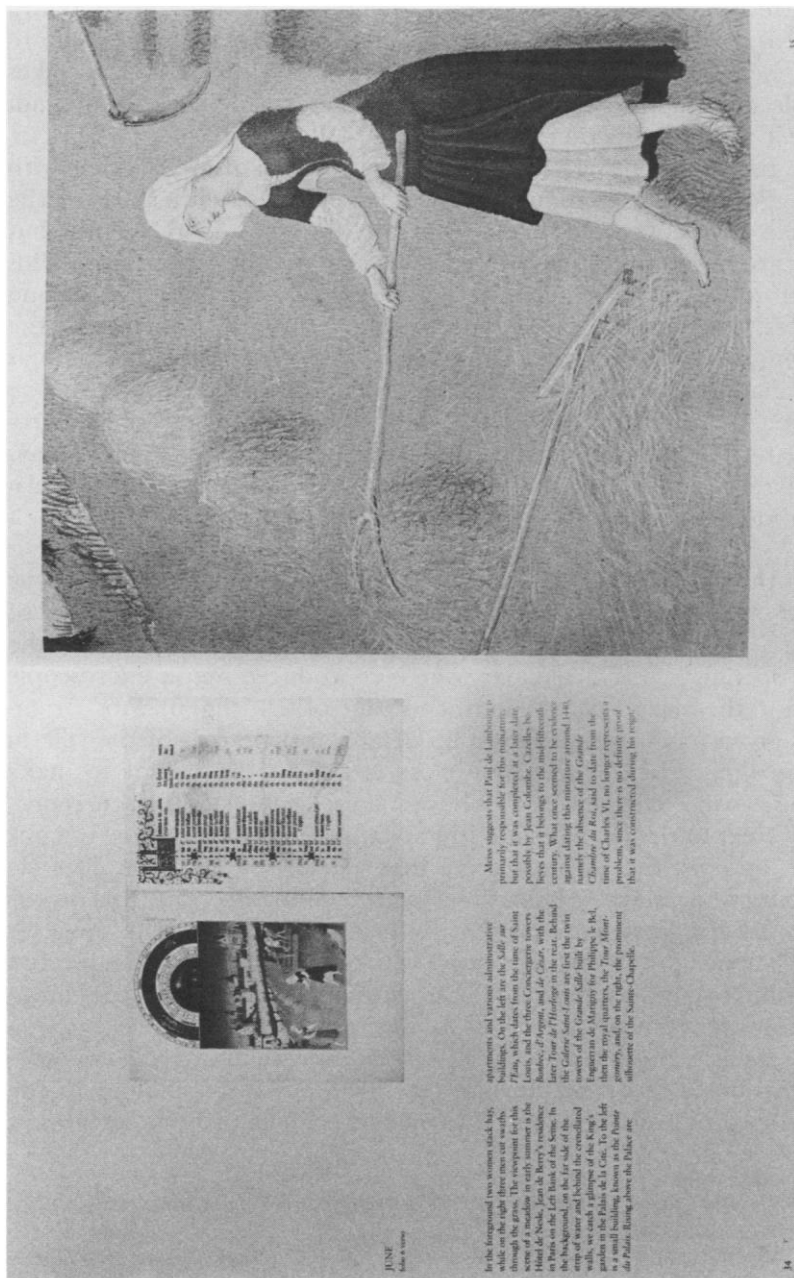


FIG. 6.

the original manuscript onto a television screen. These reproductions are "better than the original in some ways because you can magnify small areas of the text," according to the curator ("P," p. 23). One of the revolutionary functions of photography for Benjamin was the close-up, "with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" ("WA," p. 237). With the laser disc one can discern the single brushstroke of Pol and his brothers, the eyelashes and fingernails of the figures, revealing "entirely new structural formations of the subject" ("WA," p. 236). These techniques, however, are used in *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth* to mystify image-making and to "blow-up" to transcendent proportions the fetish of the brushstroke, fragmenting the manuscript into a collage of vastly different scales, details, and scholarly viewpoints. This makes it a perfect problematic object for the postmodern coffee table.

3. Postmodernist Reproductions and the Historicist Facsimile

The contemporary cultural reproduction and reception of the *Très Riches Heures* is best measured in the words of Umberto Eco, whose foreword to *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth* marks a striking comparison to Meiss's of twenty years before. Whereas Meiss stressed the reified genius of the Limbourgs' vision within modernist expectations of the history of painting, Eco's response is subjective and overtly rejects the clue-seeking of the "critic or art historian" to see the images as records of the "life, habits, society, and tastes of the late Middle Ages." "The *Très Riches Heures* is a cinematic document, a visual presentation that reveals the life of an age. But no film could ever match the scrupulousness, the splendour, the moving beauty of its reconstruction" (I, pp. 7, 8).⁴⁰ Eco the semiotician here fails to see that the *Très Riches Heures* has, in his discourse, become a sign of the medieval. This description suggests that it is an unmediated, unproblematic depiction of historical experience without any of the conventions that distinguish, as Panofsky saw, aristocrat from peasant. Eco knows that the film medium is not an innocent relay of reality, but here he seems to suggest, by approximating the calendar images to it, that we can accept them as pictorial documents. The panoramas and chateaux painted in the backgrounds have long been recognized as those with particular associations with the duc de Berry, but this makes them even more likely to be ideologically distorted than topographically accurate. The

40. See also the use of the June image in Eco's *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Conn., 1986).



FIG. 7.—Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 1284. *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*. Folio 6 verso: June. From the photograph collection of the department of art, the University of Chicago.

June haymaking scene (fig. 7) shows the view from the Hôtel de Nesle, Berry's Paris residence across fields where peasants are at work (are they his villeins? No one has ever addressed the issue of *what* and *who* they represent), to the royal palace, the residence of his nephew, the king. Such views are ideologically telescoped and cannot be taken at face value. A detail from this page was used as the cover illustration for the English publication of Eco's *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. Was it meant to represent beauty, or art, or as Eco would have it, a cinematic slice of life?

The myth of the real in these miniatures was taken to its extreme in a recent publication that interprets each calendar scene as a record of a particular event in the duke's life. Saint-Jean Bourdin sees the book as a "family album" and identified dozens of portraits, for instance, in the crowd around Jean de Berry in the January page. This urge to see each miniature in a "façon très realiste" manifests itself in the unusual cover to his book, which has a color reproduction of a modern drawing of the duke stuck on a color photograph of the Bois de Vincennes surmounted by the typed caption "Octobre 1412, le duc Jean de BERRI séjournait au CHATEAU qui l'avait vu naître en Novembre 1340" (fig. 8). This might be seen as pictorially paradigmatic of the new historicist need to create concrete contexts, to put albeit fictively historical figures in settings, and see depictions as directly representative of experience. The reader might not realize that this picture of the duke is a composite drawing/photograph and not a newly discovered page from the *Très Riches Heures* itself! The manuscript nowhere shows the duke outside one of his residences: only modern historians have read into every picture his stalking presence. It is also significant that in his opening remarks Bourdin makes reference not to the original manuscript but to the "remarquable ouvrage sorti des presses de la Maison Draeger," who produced the Braziller facsimile, suggesting that his own research need not focus on the original since he is concerned with the "what" rather than the "how" of depiction.⁴¹ This also shows how scholarship is itself dependent on reproductions.

To return to the scintillating close-ups in *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth*, one needs to ask what information they give us about the original manuscript. Photographs taken decades ago show the June page to have been damaged around the head of the girl haymaking on the far left. This is not the detail chosen for reproduction in the new volume most likely because the marks of this damage are probably still detectable. Not only are many reproductions touched-up as in the case of the *Life* February page, but the pure originals themselves are also restored and repainted. Works of art are not timeless; they deteriorate

41. Saint-Jean Bourdin, *Analyses des "Très Riches Heures" du Duc de Berry: Identification des personnages figurant dans le calendrier* (Dourdan, 1982).

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SAINT-JEAN BOURDIN

ANALYSES DES
TRÈS RICHES HEURES
du DUC de BERRY



FIG. 8.

and undergo subtle transformation like everything else in the world. My photograph of this page is not a printed reproduction but a print from a negative that records an earlier stage in the appearance of the manuscript—an appearance that contradicts the notion of any facsimile being “true” to a pure, unchanging, original state.

While Eco’s foreword makes the same claim for the “real,” he goes on to present two other opposing views of the manuscript. The second is the “fantastic,” which he sees in its margins and decorative aspects, although by comparison with other works, especially those produced in England and Flanders, the marginal art is nothing exceptional. He links this to his third category: “distraction.” Here he imagines the motivations of the owner in a passage that is just as mythical as Bourdin’s book cover:

We can imagine the Duc de Berry following this symphony of riotous reds and heavenly blues, of royal purples and demure pinks, of sunny yellows and deep greens, perhaps often running his fingers appreciatively along the gold that encrusts every page of this manuscript—simply for his own pleasure. And yet, in so doing, he believed that he was celebrating (in a most enjoyable way), the divine presence on earth. Moreover, with charming inconsistency, he could feel virtuous and humble in the midst of this sumptuous entertainment that he had granted himself. [*I*, p. 10]

This mythical reconstruction of context is typical of what Fredric Jameson has termed “the loss of the radical past” in postmodernist culture. If the historical novel now can no longer represent “the historical past: it can only ‘represent’ our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes ‘pop history’),” the same is true for historical representations. We are “condemned to seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach.”⁴² For Eco the Middle Ages is a simulacrum of our present culture in which the illuminated manuscript is akin to the Museum of Modern Art and the cathedral becomes Hollywood.⁴³ This fragmentation of historical perception is present in the layout of the book itself and its title, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the “Très Riches Heures” du Duc de Berry*. The latter sets the whole thing up as a macrocosmic model of the universe of the Middle Ages while the layout, reproducing everything either much larger or much smaller than the original, reconstitutes the pages for the obsessive gaze of realistic detail, fantasy, or distraction in Eco’s terms. However, the real

42. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July–Aug. 1984): 71.

43. See Eco, “Living in the New Middle Ages,” *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York, 1986), p. 83.

function of this volume is stated in small print facing the contents page. Along with the Library of Congress cataloguing data we read that it is the “commentary volume to facsimile edition of: Les très riches heures du duc de Berry /Raymond Cazelles. New York: H. N. Abrams; Lucerne: Faksimilé-Verlag, © 1984.” Nothing need be the right size because this is only the ghostly ninety-five-dollar appended subtext to the “real” thing—the ultimate simulacra painstakingly produced by Faksimilé-Verlag of Lucerne and costing over ten thousand dollars.

The word *facsimile* at one time meant to transcribe a written copy; by the eighteenth century there are references to drawings being copied *per factum simile*—to make an exact likeness. In 1882 there is an interesting use, suggesting the link to photography and describing something as “the work of the artist who adapts, and not of the photographer who facsimiles.”⁴⁴ Facsimiles have a long history, but the present-day concept of the term is carefully explained in publicity material put out by the producers in a booklet entitled “Masterpieces of Book Illumination in Genuine Facsimile Editions.” Here the emphasis is on not only the “aura” of the medieval original but also the ways in which the magic of technology can replicate that aura, usually experienced only by that other mysterious figure, the scholar.

Who knows much about this pre-Gutenberg age? Who knows the unique works which lie in libraries, hidden away like gold in theft and fire-proof strongrooms, accessible at best—and then seldom enough—to accredited scholars. . . . It is a wonderful feeling to actually hold and peruse at leisure a priceless manuscript written by hand hundreds of years ago! Modern techniques in reproduction make this possible. The magic word is facsimile. By facsimile reproduction we make these old manuscripts accessible, either directly or throughout libraries, to scholars and a broader public—without however endangering the continued existence of the original.⁴⁵

This is not the case with the *Très Riches Heures*, which, precisely because of the facsimile the leaflet tells us, will never be seen again. The reproductive process here has directly led to the nonexistence of the original. The argument over accessibility is even more problematic because most libraries cannot afford these expensively produced objects. In fact,

44. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “facsimile.” See also Nordenfalk, *Color of the Middle Ages*, and the important discussion of medieval attitudes to copies by Alexander, “Facsimiles, Copies, and Variations: The Relationship to the Model in Medieval and Renaissance European Illuminated Manuscripts,” in *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions*, Studies in the History of Art, vol. 20 (1989), pp. 61–75.

45. “Masterpieces of Book Illumination in Genuine Facsimile Editions,” Faksimilé-Verlag Luzern, publicity material, special supplement to *Export Polygraph International* (Frankfurt am Main, n.d.), p. 2; hereafter abbreviated “MBI.”

eighty percent of the limited edition is sold not to libraries but to private collectors. The reproductions here reproduce the priceless rarity of their original referents.

The perpetuation of high-art ideology in reproduction can be seen in the way this leaflet seeks to define words like *facsimile* and *original*, stating that the dictionary definition of *facsimile* as an exact copy or reproduction of an original is too general. "The present-day state of the market demands—in the interest of the purchaser—a more precise definition of the 'original' and exact standards for its reproduction. The buyer will not be indifferent as to whether he buys one of the copies from the edition of the work which has been printed before, or whether he is dealing with a true facsimile of a unique manuscript of which only one copy exists." There are eight conditions that must be fulfilled to properly describe something as a "true" facsimile:

1. *Reproduction of a manuscript should be true, in all respects, to the original and should be produced according to the best printing techniques.*

...

2. The facsimile should reproduce the *present-day condition* of the original *unaltered* in all respects.

3. The *surface* on which the facsimile is to be printed should approximate the material of the original as closely as possible. . . .

4. The edges of every page of a facsimile should correspond to the *cut* of the original. . . .

5. The *binding* should . . . be an exact duplicate of the original. . . .

6. *Limited editions and corresponding numbering of the copies* . . . [are] a firm indication of the value of a facsimile edition.

7. *Scholarly presentation.* The facsimile edition should be accompanied by a volume of scholarly commentary; without this it would be incomplete. . . .

8. Facsimiles are *active conservation of our cultural heritage*. In the event of damage or destruction, a facsimile which fulfills the above-mentioned specifications can be a worthy replacement of the original. ["MBI," p. 3]

Anyone who has had the opportunity to use one of these books will recall how each paper page replicates in glossy image the shape, size, and color but never the feel or texture of the vellum page. This location of reproduction to the purely ocular is important. It concurs with the "perceptualist fallacy" that Norman Bryson sees as a current in Western art history, which reduces everything to the purely visual level.⁴⁶ Half-closing our eyes we can "believe in" the facsimile in the same way we might perceive a Vermeer painting as a vision of reality except that the illusion is of the reality of another illusion—the work of

46. See Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, Conn., 1983).

art. Like Zeuxis' birds pecking at illusory grapes we are struck by the false appearance only when we touch.

Our response to the facsimile is intimately bound up with the way we look at photographs, although the producers of these objects want to play down the photographic aspect. In a section called "Electronics and the Old Crafts," Faksimilé-Verlag Luzern states quite rightly that "without technology there could not be facsimiles." They quickly interject, however, that "technology alone does not suffice—this is only an aid—also the human 'know how' factor is of major importance" ("MBI," p. 5). This is stressed by another manufacturer, Belvedere Press, who, in announcing a project to make facsimiles of "the rarest and most beautiful books in the world" from the Vatican library, includes a whole page outlining the process of making each volume. Throughout this description of the color computer that matches the colors to the original, which can take as long as "five hours per page," and the laser scanners, emphasis is on the handcraft and individual production of the object as a kind of "fine art." Not to deny the enormous skill involved in these processes, the way the facsimile is presented here subtly folds in the idea of the "art" involved in photolithographic reproduction. As a "rebirth" of a work of art, the metaphor suggests not the idea of copying so much as creation.⁴⁷ "A good facsimile is worth its price," according to the producers of the *Très Riches Heures*, because it "represents a double value: its artistic and historical substance outlasts generations, gaining in significance with time; on the other hand it is a one-time achievement in craftsmanship which has its legitimate price—and it is well worth it" ("MBI," p. 6).

The publicity of Faksimilé-Verlag points out that these limited editions are soon sold out and can double in value in a very short time. Reproductions, like originals, are intimately bound up with the market. The ideology of "cultural" preservation we have seen here is not any different than that of d'Aumale believing he had rescued from oblivion a monument from the past. This ideology must be seen as masking possession and value. Preservation and profit are closely linked in the sense that along with the "historical value" time adds a premium in monetary terms. As more and more artworks sell for astronomical sums the status of these objects as regards access and perception becomes ever more problematic. The twelfth-century gospel-book of Henry the Lion sold for DM 32.5 million in 1983 (the most ever paid for a manuscript) and is now available in facsimile costing DM 34,000.⁴⁸ The issue

47. Belvedere Press, "From the Archives of the Vatican Library: The Rebirth of Invaluable Works of Art," publicity material (Millwood, N.Y., 1986).

48. Published by Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, who point out in their publicity material (1985) how the "former banker and well-known patron Hermann J. Abs" "successfully bid for the manuscript . . . and thus return[ed] it to Germany."

at stake here is which manuscripts are chosen to be reproduced. Look at the lists of available facsimiles: it is neither the more historically interesting nor inaccessible examples that have been chosen but those that have been made famous by the market, like the gospel of Henry the Lion, or those that are most richly decorated (according to our tastes), which explains why there are many more facsimiles of boring and pretty fifteenth-century books of hours than thirteenth-century psalters. Another more disturbing aspect to these publications is the hidden nationalistic agenda. They are aimed in Europe at the patrimony-minded Germans and Swiss and, in America as well, at Jewish groups to whom lavish reproductions of medieval Haggadah manuscripts are touted as cultural capital. The Irish are a market for the new facsimile of the *Book of Kells*.⁴⁹

What is the *Très Riches Heures*, then, or where is it left for our understanding today, since it exists only through thousands of reproductions of different types and ranges of quality? Jean Baudrillard describes tyrannous reproductive strategies that are the obverse of Benjamin's utopian vision of the masses' arrogation of art whereby "the very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*. . . . The real is not only what can be reproduced, but *that which is always already reproduced*."⁵⁰ In 1974 the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers made *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, which was exhibited in 1975 in various museums in Germany and England (fig. 9). It is a diptych, one part being a stencilled, painted alphabet, the other a set of twelve mounted postcards of the calendar of the Chantilly manuscript. According to one critic, the work does not refer to the "reality of the book," which is "absent, in another time," but stands on its own "without the air of an artistic fetish and points to the real qualities of craftsmanship, imagination, and luxury of its subject."⁵¹ Here reproduction operates in Benjamin's sense, revitalizing and resituating an original. Broodthaers understood how the *Très Riches Heures* exists for us only through its fragmentary simulacra, and he attempts to constitute a meaning, an alphabet, a text from that emptiness.

49. *Kells* is published by the same company who produce the *Très Riches Heures*, Faksimilé-Verlag Luzern, and costs 16,000 dollars. The brochure (entitled "The Book of Kells") describes a thirty-day free trial of two pages and a documentation kit as well as advertising wall showcases in Lucite which allow the book to be used as a table decoration. There is also a video advertizing its "romantic" Irish associations (which does not mention the fact that it was not made, in all probability, in Ireland but on the island of Iona). Only thirty percent of the orders of this incredible object are from libraries, most being from private collectors according to an article by George Hill and Colin Brennan, "In the Beginning . . .," *London Sunday Times*, 20 Jan. 1989.

50. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York, 1983), p. 146.

51. Michael Compton, "In Praise of the Subject," in *Marcel Broodthaers*, p. 58.

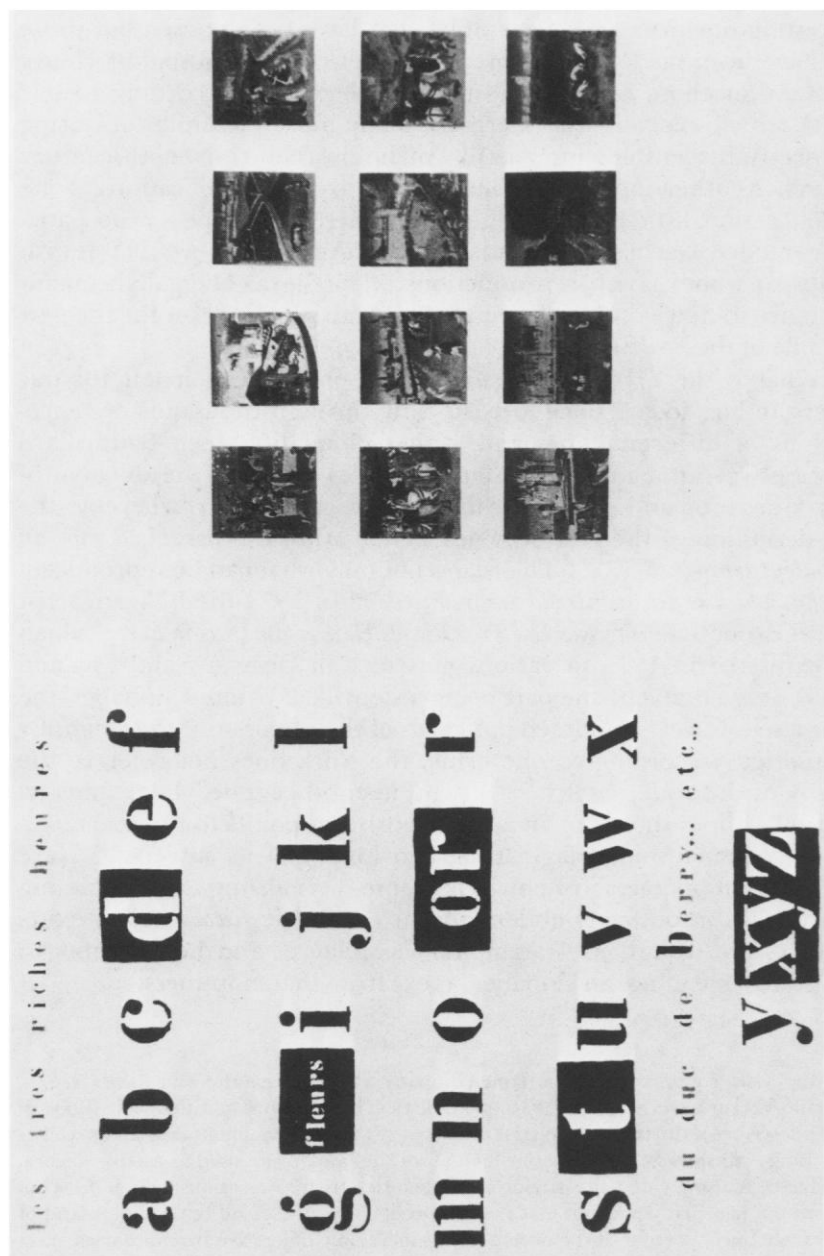


FIG. 9.—Marcel Broodthaers, *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, 1974–75. Oil on canvas, postcards on canvas. Canvas: 126.5 × 96 cm. Card: 53.5 × 58.5 cm. Galerie Michel Werner, Cologne.

I hope to have suggested how we need to be wary of our referents, their reproduction and ideological displacement in the present, and how technical forms of reproduction are linked to institutional power and control. I do not wish to reify the unobtainable original nor play down the importance of giving people access to images from the past through copies. The Xerox machine, for example, has probably had a more profound impact on art history than any recent French philosopher. My anxiety is not in response to the loss of an ideal referent but the duplicity by which that unique object becomes cultural capital through reproduction. As I stare at the three color versions of the January page in the *Verve*, *Life*, and Braziller volumes (I have only once had a chance to see the rare recent facsimile), it does not really matter which blue, gold, and saturation of red is closest to the thing in the dark vault at Chantilly. That object has ascended into the realm of pure form and only visually exists as a large number of zeroes on an insurance document, like the invisible money that keeps afloat our simulacral postcapitalist economy.

The disappearance of the *Très Riches Heures* in the proliferation of its simulacra and even in Broodthaers's poignant postcard/painting seems to have taken us a long way from manuscript illuminations of the Middle Ages. But not really. A New Years' gift given by the Limbourg brothers to the duc de Berry on 1 January 1411 and listed in the same inventory alongside the *Très Riches Heures* was "a counterfeit book [*un livre contrefait*] made of wood, with no pages and nothing written within," covered in white velvet and adorned with the Duke's arms.⁵² This visual joke depends on the fact that by this date you *could* judge a book of hours by its cover and that for some rich patrons, like the duc de Berry, show was more important than content. The Limbourgs' conceit in producing this hollow hoax is an early example of the simulacral codex. Although its unopenable emptiness makes it more comparable to the present state of the *Très Riches Heures* itself, the Limbourgs' *livre contrefait*, their antimanuscript with all its rich duplicitous surface, was a premonition of things to come. In it they fashioned their own glossy first facsimile.

52. Jules Guiffrey, *Inventaires de Jean duc de Berry (1401-1416)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1894-96), 1:265.